



## A Message From the Director



It was great to see so many of you at our virtual town hall. Our Department is so large and spread over a big land mass. I am thankful that modern technology offers us the chance to be in the same room together. I was also honored that our organized labor colleagues from SEIU joined us. There is so much we can get done working together.

And special kudos to the staff at Humphrey who did a great presentation on their efforts to make their facility more patient-friendly.

Lots of great progress happening across the Department. Our primary care empanelment has linked over 380,000 patients with their own medical provider. E-consult now includes almost all specialties, with the last few to join shortly. We are marching toward our ORCHID implementation date at Harbor and the surrounding clinics on November 1.

I feel so proud to be the Director of the Department. As many of you know, it was not easy for me to pull my children out of their school and separate them from their friends to come to Los Angeles (and they grumbled about it fiercely). But what a difference three years makes. Look at the picture below of my daughter Roxie, age 10, surfing near Malibu. Clearly she has made the transition to the Los Angeles life!



## Labor Union, DHS Forge New Path

By Michael Wilson

Collaboration was the theme in a “virtual town hall” session hosted by DHS director Mitchell Katz, MD, SEIU 721 president Bob Schoonover, and SEIU 721 chief of staff Gilda Valdez on the topic of improving the patient experience and employee morale. The videoconference allowed 17 facilities and hundreds of employees to participate in real time.

Katz said the department must retain the over 380,000 empaneled patients to pay for the care of those who will remain uninsured in L.A. County. He praised a new partnership with SEIU 721 focused on finding common ground to deliver exceptional patient care and remain a provider of choice.

“If we don’t come together with the employer and work with rank and file in a different way we can’t succeed,” said Valdez. “We’re talking about survival and delivering the quality health system that allows us to survive and provide the best care for our communities.”

One component of the partnership is development of Care Improvement Teams (CITs) -- facili-

ty-based teams of managers and front-line staff that meet regularly to identify problem areas and make process improvements. The teams implement rapid tests of change to improve areas like registration and appointment wait time, specialty visit backlogs, and phone hold time.

The Gateway CIT Project at Humphrey Health Center was singled out for capturing the spirit

of the new partnership. Three separate teams are tackling issues with empanelment, registration, and the call center. Appointment call wait time has been reduced from 12 minutes to two minutes. In reg-

istration, over 78% of patients are now in the provider’s office at the allotted time, a 50% improvement in just a few months. Schoonover extolled the effort, saying “SEIU is invested in the process and we intend to see this health system succeed.”

“This work doesn’t happen overnight,” added Valdez. “If our morale is high we’ll give great care and that resides on a great system. Anytime you welcome a patient and you’re the first person

“Everyone’s got to jump in and be part of the solution.”

- Gilda Valdez,  
SEIU 721

(See ‘TOWN HALL’ on back)



ORCHID project team members test the new system for readiness.

## ORCHID Readied for Launch

By Diane Waskul

With the ORCHID Go-Live less than 100 days away, the project team is pushing to get the system fully tested. The phased rollout of the new electronic medical record system begins at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center and the Coastal Health Centers (Wilmington, Bellflower and Long Beach) on November 1. Following the Harbor-UCLA implementation, other DHS sites will go up according to the following schedule: the MLK Outpatient Center Cluster on Febru-

ary 1, 2015; the LAC+USC Medical Center Cluster on May 1, 2015; the High Desert Regional Health Center Cluster on August 1, 2015; the Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center on November 1, 2015; and the Olive View-UCLA Medical Center Cluster on February 1, 2016. Over the past several months project teams have been customizing the system with the help of hundreds of subject matter experts. Teams have completed the detailed system planning and

(See ‘READIED’ on back)



(‘READIED’)

building work that will touch everyone from financial services workers to pharmacists and surgeons. The system will replace Affinity and provide a single unified record for every DHS patient. “Round one of integration testing recently wrapped up and shows that all the functional areas work together as one system,” said ORCHID information technology director Pam Griffith. “A rigorous second round of testing will be conducted in August to ensure that patient information and charting elements flow even more effectively across ORCHID and to all connected systems.”

Other upcoming ORCHID milestones include Super User and End User Training, the import of historical data from Affinity and lab systems into ORCHID, site-by-site testing of equipment, go-live activation planning, creation of a contingency plan for potential downtime, deployment of an

enterprise maintenance support plan, and the launch of the patient portal which will allow patients to access their records online.

Staff at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center participated in an ORCHID fair last month on campus where they got a chance to demo the system, ask questions, learn about features, and get a preview of how workflows will change once the new system is implemented.

You can stay updated on your facility’s ORCHID implementation by connecting with your chief medical information officer, subject matter expert, ORCHID deputy, physician or clinician champion. There is also a dedicated ORCHID intranet page with a variety of educational and updated implementation information, <http://myladhs.lacounty.gov/collaboration/epmo/Projects/ORCHID>.

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## Debt Free: Financial Programs Incentivize Safety Net Providers

By Michael Wilson

More than 30 clinicians in DHS are recipients of state scholarship and loan repayment programs totaling nearly \$700,000. The awards, some including a County match, are the result of a new department program that connects providers with state financial assistance to help them reduce their education debt. The department also gains an edge in recruitment.

Most recipients are physicians, but awardees also include certified medical assistants, radiology technicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners.

According to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges, physician graduates in 2013 had on average \$169,000 in education debt; residency and fellowship programs can raise debt even higher, pushing many post-grads to consider careers in more lucrative specialization fields just as health systems face new pressures to hire primary care doctors. Other factors beyond tuition can add to debt, such as accrued interest on loans. Medical school students increasingly have debt from undergraduate education and there are rising numbers of “non-traditional” students with children to support. Others come to medicine with debt from other graduate programs, like business or law. All told, physicians in particular can face over \$300,000 in debt as they begin their careers.

“Typically those who come to work for the County are driven by mission, and we’ve always offered a good benefits package,” says DHS Ambulatory Care Net-



The Ambulatory Care Network’s Research and Innovation Unit staff meet to discuss HPSA designations and loan repayment.

work (ACN) chief research and innovation officer Jeffrey Guterman, MD. “But this is the first time we’ve set up a formal program to link providers to award programs as a strategic retention strategy.” Guterman says a key challenge was to increase the number Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations throughout the County and to also increase the score in previously designated HPSA areas – essential prerequisites for most healthcare scholarship and repayment programs. The herculean effort was accomplished by the research and innovation staff led by Ellen Gail.

Department leaders believe the program will continue to grow and attract physicians, nurses, and allied professionals to consider safety net careers. With now over 32 HPSA designations in L.A. County, DHS has improved its position to recruit and retain high qualified candidates. For more information on the program, contact Ellen Gail at [egail@dhs.lacounty.gov](mailto:egail@dhs.lacounty.gov).

## And One More Thing...



L.A. County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas joins representatives from the DHS Housing for Health Unit and the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD) at the opening of a new permanent supportive housing apartment complex in South

LA. The complex will house chronically homeless individuals and families who are high utilizers of DHS services. The project represents successful collaboration among Los Angeles County, Los Angeles City, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the Los Angeles Housing Department, the Department of Mental Health, and others. Ten of the 43 units are specifically designed for the visually, physically or mobility impaired.



(‘TOWN HALL’)



they see, how you respond to them sets tone of how they will be for the entire visit.” The town hall also gave participants an opportunity to share ideas and ask questions ranging from health plan contracting to performance evaluations. DHS envisions empaneling up to 500,000 covered patients, which will enable the department to expand contracts with more health plans. The eConsult and teleretinal programs were also highlighted as major clinical accomplishments that reduce the need for face visits and allow those with pressing needs to get one more rapidly. Labor and department leaders acknowledged employees for their hard work during the transformation and for taking on expanded roles and duties. They also voiced commitment to the bargaining process and to taking necessary steps to ensure that employees work in a high-functioning system that is prepared for future growth. Watch the town hall by clicking here: <http://myladhspublic.lacounty.gov/drkatzz/SitePages/KatzVideoMessages.aspx>